

## News Release

# Instructional Technology Center Students Intern at UMC

By Elizabeth Tollefson on Wednesday, August 17, 2005

The Instructional Technology Center at the University of Minnesota, Crookston typically doesn't hire student interns over the summer.

But this summer at the UMC ITC isn't just any summer. Charged with the task of overhauling the campus' entire Website – more than 17,000 individual Web pages in all – meant that ITC staff members Steve Hannah and Kelly Nelson needed some reinforcements.

They found them in students Rhonda Miller, Dan Pagnac, Alexis Graff and Josh Brule, information technology wizards all.

Miller and Graff hail from the Greenbush/Middle River area, Pagnac is from Thief River Falls, and Brule calls Crookston home.

"We pretty much have northwestern Minnesota covered," Hannah said recently as he watched the quartet of interns plow their way through a few of the thousands upon thousands of Web pages to be revamped. "Northwestern Minnesota can be very proud of the work these four students are doing."

Hannah and Nelson didn't openly advertise for the ITC internship slots available this summer. They had four students in mind, and they were able to land all four of them.

### Huge, critical job

Statistics have consistently shown that the majority of UMC students make their first contact with UMC by visiting its Website and surfing around. Given that, having a site that doesn't look good, function efficiently and provide an overall positive and satisfying experience to visitors – whether or not they're prospective students – simply is not an option, Hannah said.

"It's very essential for our marketing to potential students that they find useful, accurate and up to date information on the site," he explained. "If they don't, it's a very bad reflection on UMC and the University of Minnesota. Before many of them do anything, they're visiting our site. It has to meet and even exceed their expectations."

The enormity of the task at hand has for the most part consumed the entire ITC summer agenda, Nelson said.

In addition to making the site more attractive and user-friendly for visitors, the ITC interns are trying to make it easier for UMC faculty and staff to update their own program or department Websites. Using the latest software available, it's been an ongoing challenge for the ITC in recent years to encourage and train faculty and staff on the importance of maintaining and updating their own sites. The results have been mixed.

But with "Contribute," the latest software being implemented by the ITC, Pagnac said faculty and staff will be amazed at how easy it is to change and update text and add or replace photos on their various Websites.

"Contribute is just easier; it's that simple," he said, spinning his laptop computer around to show a screen featuring an individual UMC program homepage. Then Pagnac moved his cursor to a couple spots on the page and clicked his mouse. "I just changed 51 pages at one time."

On the surface, the thought of changing 51 pages with a couple of mouse clicks might not sound wonderful to faculty and staff who get jittery at the thought of changing their Websites. In fact, it might be the stuff that triggers nightmares, as they fear they could accidentally alter many, many Webpages with the simple click of a mouse.

Not to worry, Pagnac said, motioning back to his computer screen. He then proceeded to click his mouse many times on the homepage's buttons, navigation bars and other components. Nothing changed. Contribute wouldn't let him change any of the site's templates.

"You can change a date in the text, delete an old paragraph and add a new one, or replace an old photo with a new one," Pagnac explained. "Contribute won't let you break anything. That's what's so great about it."

"We're breaking it down by audience now," he explained. "If I'm a visitor to the site, I should be able to easily click to what is of most interest to me. Doing that shouldn't be confusing or difficult. But making changes that significant requires page-by-page improvements."

The finished product, he added, will contain fewer than 17,000 pages.

"The result will be a more manageable site," Hannah said.

Doing all that requires an enormous amount of code writing and Web programming. The bulk of that daunting task falls on the lap of Brule, a 2002 Crookston High School graduate who's likely headed to Rochester after graduating from UMC next year. He recently worked his way through various pages within some of UMC's academic program sites. At the table next to him, Miller – bound for graduate school at Minnesota State University-Moorhead to pursue a masters degree in non-profit administration – made changes to UMC's Residential Life Webpages. Graff, an accounting major, sat next to Miller, scanning various course syllabi and pouring over material involving UMC's re-accreditation process with the Higher Learning Commission.

Graff will graduate from UMC in a year, then plans on taking the CPA exam to become a certified public accountant. Along with everything she's learning in the ITC this summer, she said being involved in such a huge project would look good on her resume.

### Finish in sight

The goal, Nelson explained, is keeping the ITC in control of UMC's overall Website and the templates and formats that serve as its backbone. But giving faculty and staff a degree of control and the confidence to exercise that control is a critical part of this summer's work, he added.

The goal is to have it all finished by the time fall classes start. Nelson, for one, is confident, mostly because the interns have taken on every challenge, every task with a vengeance.

"They've done tons and tons of sites," he said. "They go through them so fast we've had a hard time keeping them busy a couple times."

But, Hannah stressed, the site will never, technically, be finished. But that's not a bad thing.

"A Website is supposed to be an ongoing process, a process of constant improvement," he explained. "It's never supposed to be finished."

Although the software the interns are using for the project is fairly basic, Hannah said Graff, Brule, Miller and Pagnac have to think on their feet.

"They need to think through logic and how information is organized, and we try to leave them to make as many decisions on their own as possible because we don't want to lay out every single step for them," he explained. "Eventually, that gives them a level of respect for what goes into making important decisions on your own, and the common sense that it takes to make a decision and move ahead. This is about a lot more than simply possessing a great deal of technical skill."

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